

The Lived-Experiences of African Migrant Professionals in Diverse Workplaces in Australia

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Abstract: This study examines the lived experiences of 44 African migrant professionals in Australian workplaces. Using phenomenological inquiry and thematic analysis, the research explored the challenges these professionals face and the coping mechanisms they employ in navigating workplace dynamics across various industries. This paper highlights three significant challenges identified in the findings: the pervasive nature of microaggressions and subtle biases in professional interactions, unspoken challenges and the emergence of inter-migrant discrimination, a phenomenon previously underexplored in Australian workplace studies. The research also revealed various coping strategies employed by these professionals, including striving for performance excellence, affirming cultural pride and identity, and cultivating a positive mindset. This research contributes to the literature on workplace diversity by revealing the nuanced interplay between cultural identity, professional recognition, and workplace inclusion. The findings offer practical insights for organisations seeking to move beyond superficial diversity initiatives towards creating genuinely inclusive environments that value diverse perspectives and experiences in the Australian professional context.

Keywords: African migrants, workplace inclusion, diversity, professional integration, Australia

The migration of African professionals to Australia has been a significant trend over the past few decades, driven by the skilled migration and humanitarian programs (Bolaji et al., 2022; Fozdar, 2023). The number of African-born residents in Australia has increased steadily, reflecting broader global migration patterns and Australia's demand for skilled labor (Gatwiri et al., 2023). As of the latest census data, African migrants represent a diverse and growing demographic, contributing to various sectors of the Australian economy (Gatwiri & Anderson, 2021; Hugo, 2009; Hugo 2016; Hugo et al., 2019).

For many African professionals, the journey to Australia begins with the recognition of their qualifications by Australian authorities, a process that often involves verifying educational credentials, work experience, and, in some cases, passing additional examinations or obtaining certifications to meet Australian standards (Bolaji et al., 2022; Ozkan, 2018; Segal, 2024; Tan & Cebulla 2023). In addition, proficiency in English is a critical requirement, with applicants

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required to achieve a high score on internationally recognized English language tests such as the IELTS or PTE (International English Language Testing System or Pearson Testing Examination). This ensures that incoming professionals are not only capable of contributing to their respective fields but also capable of integrating effectively into the Australian workplace and society.

In addition to skilled migration, a significant number of African professionals get to Australia through humanitarian pathways, including the refugee and asylum seeker programs (Molla, 2021). These individuals often come from regions affected by conflict, political instability, or persecution. While the primary focus of humanitarian migration is on providing protection and resettlement, many of these migrants are highly qualified professionals who bring valuable skills and experiences to Australia (Bolaji et al., 2022; Bolaji, et al., 2020).

This influx of diverse talents has brought both opportunities and challenges to the Australian workplace, particularly in terms of inclusion, diversity, and fostering a sense of belonging among migrant professionals (Rajendran et al., 2017; Rajendran et al., 2020). As workplaces become increasingly diverse and multicultural, understanding the experiences of African migrant professionals is crucial for developing effective strategies to harness their skills and create truly inclusive work environments (Chidiac, 2018; Gowan, 2021; Shan et al., 2021). African migrants face unique challenges as they navigate unfamiliar workplace cultures while also contending with potential discrimination and stereotypes (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2007).

This background provides the necessary justification for a detailed exploration of the lived experiences of African migrant professionals in Australian workplaces as an essential focus of this study. Understanding the context of the challenges they face offers a nuanced perspective on the factors influencing their sense of belonging and inclusion in their professional lives. More importantly, examining these experiences provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of diversity and inclusion narratives in contemporary Australian workplaces. It also informs a shared understanding of Australian values and highlight the progress made in overcoming the barriers to creating truly welcoming environments for professionals from diverse backgrounds for developing more effective diversity strategies to promote workplace inclusivity within the Australian context.

Statement of the Problem

While Australia's multicultural policies have aimed to promote diversity and inclusion (Aw et al., 2024; Ho, 2013; Jakubowicz & Ho, 2014; Jupp, 2002), the lived experiences of African migrants often reveal a gap between policy intentions and workplace realities. This disparity underscores the need for a deeper understanding of the challenges and difficulties faced by this group of professionals. Although, a few studies have addressed the difficulties migrants generally encounter in the Australian labor market. These include challenges in having overseas qualifications recognized (Cheng et al., 2021; Hawthorne, 2015), and discrimination (Booth et al., 2012; Kosny et al., 2017; Rajendran et al., 2017). However, the distinct lived experiences of African migrant professionals, who bring unique cultural, linguistic, and professional backgrounds to the workforce, are underexplored. This gap in the literature is particularly noteworthy, given the potential insights it could offer into improving workplace inclusivity and integration for this group.

Rationale for the Study

The study addressed the gap in literature about the lived experiences of African migrant professionals in Australian workplaces by providing a comprehensive examination of their encounters with issues of inclusion, diversity, and sense of belonging. Specifically, the study sought to explore the challenges faced by these professionals in navigating Australian workplace culture and identify the strategies and coping mechanisms they employ to overcome barriers and achieve professional success. The research investigated how cultural identity impacts workplace integration and professional development. The study contributes to the growing body of literature on migrant lived experiences in diverse workplaces and offers valuable insights for organizations aiming to foster more inclusive environments. It also provides a platform for amplifying the voices of African migrant professionals, offering a nuanced understanding of their lived experiences within the Australian professional landscape.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided the study were:

1. What challenges do African migrant professionals face in navigating Australian workplace culture?
2. What strategies and coping mechanisms do they employ to overcome these barriers to achieve professional success?

The research questions aligned with its rationale and were designed to elicit comprehensive responses that will contribute to a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of African migrant professionals in Australian workplaces. These questions were crafted not only to address the specific aims of the study but also to provide valuable insights into the broader discourse on diversity, inclusion, and professional development in multicultural workplaces. They were intended to capture the nuanced experiences of African migrant professionals, offering both depth and breadth in understanding their professional lives in Australia.

Theoretical Framework

The Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Social Identity Theory (SIT) offered a comprehensive approach to understanding the lived experiences of African migrant professionals in Australian workplaces. CRT, as discussed by Delgado and Stefancic (2023), is particularly relevant as it examines the systemic racism and power dynamics embedded in workplace structures, shedding light on how these factors contribute to the challenges faced by African migrant professionals, such as cultural differences, subtle discrimination, and issues with professional recognition (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023). By focusing on institutional barriers, CRT provides critical insights into how organizational policies and practices impact inclusion and diversity (Crenshaw, 2013).

Complementing the CRT, SIT explores the personal and interpersonal aspects of identity structuring within the workplace (Tajfel & Turner, 2003). It highlights how African migrant professionals navigate their cultural identity and manage their sense of belonging within interpersonal relationships amidst the dominant workplace culture. SIT's strengths lie in its ability to analyze individual and group dynamics, including the role of support networks and mentoring, which are crucial for professional development and integration (Tajfel, 2010).

Both CRT and SIT offer a holistic understanding of both the structural and personal factors influencing workplace experiences. CRT addresses systemic issues, while SIT provides

insight into identity management and coping mechanisms, making the combined framework particularly effective for capturing the complex dynamics of inclusion, diversity, and belongingness in diverse professional settings. This integrated approach not only addresses the specific aims of the study but also contributes valuable perspectives to the broader discourse on workplace inclusivity in the Australian context (Burke & Vinnicombe, 2013; Essed, 2001).

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the experiences of African migrant professionals in Australian workplaces. The qualitative approach was chosen to capture rich, nuanced narratives that provide in-depth insights into the lived experiences of the participants, aligning with the study's aim to understand the complex dynamics of inclusion, diversity, and a sense of belonging from the perspective of African migrant professionals (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The research design utilized a phenomenological approach, which focuses on describing individuals' lived experiences related to a phenomenon as experienced by the participants themselves (Moustakas, 1994).

The phenomenological approach, grounded in the philosophical traditions of Edmund Husserl and further developed by Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, focuses on exploring and describing individuals' lived experiences concerning specific phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). The approach was used to explore how individuals perceive and interpret their experiences from their subjective viewpoints. It emphasises capturing the essence of these experiences by delving deeply into the personal meaning they hold for participants, thereby providing a nuanced understanding of their lived realities.

The approach enabled the researchers to investigate the lived experiences of African migrant professionals in Australian workplaces and allowed for an in-depth exploration of how these professionals experience and interpret their encounters with workplace inclusion, diversity, and a sense of belonging. By focusing on participants' personal narratives, phenomenology offers insights into how these professionals navigate cultural differences, address challenges related to professional recognition, and leverage support networks.

The overarching strength of the phenomenological approach is its ability to provide a deep and nuanced understanding of participants' experiences. It allows researchers to gain detailed insights into how individuals perceive and make sense of their experiences, which is crucial for exploring complex issues such as cultural adaptation and workplace inclusion (Larkin et al., 2019). In addition, phenomenology respects and highlights the subjective meanings and personal significance of experiences, which is essential for understanding the impact of cultural identity on professional integration and career progression (Van Manen, 2023). The approach also considered the context in which experiences occur, making it particularly effective in uncovering how cultural and contextual factors affect migrant professionals' experiences.

However, the phenomenological approach also has its limitations. One notable weakness is the limited generalizability of its findings. As phenomenology focuses on individual experiences, the results may not be easily applicable to broader populations or different contexts (Moustakas, 1994). Moreover, the subjective nature of data interpretation in phenomenological research can introduce researcher bias. However, through techniques such as member checking and triangulation, researchers can mitigate this bias (Sparkes & Smith, 2009). Finally, the process of analyzing phenomenological data was complex and time-consuming, as it involves extensive interpretation and thematic analysis (Van Manen, 2023).

While the phenomenological approach has limitations, this study employed several strategies to enhance credibility, rigor, and applicability. A diverse sample of professionals

across industries, experience levels, and locations was included to improve representativeness (Larkin et al., 2019; Tracy, 2010). Reflexivity was maintained through a reflective journal, ensuring transparency in data interpretation (Finlay, 2021). In addition, NVivo 12 software facilitated systematic coding and thematic development, streamlining the complex data analysis process. These measures strengthened the study's reliability while preserving the depth and authenticity of participants' lived experiences.

Despite these limitations, the phenomenological approach was appropriate for the study. Its strengths lie in capturing rich, contextualized data aligned with the objective of understanding the lived experiences of African migrant professionals in depth. By focusing on participants' subjective experiences, phenomenology provides valuable insights into the challenges and strategies associated with professional integration, as well as the role of cultural identity in shaping workplace dynamics. This approach offers a detailed and empathetic perspective on the complexities of migrant professionals' experiences, making it an appropriate choice for exploring the nuances of inclusion, diversity, and belonging in Australian workplaces.

Participants

Participants were recruited using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The purposive sampling method ensured that participants met specific criteria, including self-identification as an African migrant, professional employment in Australia, and a minimum of one year of work experience in Australia. Snowball sampling was used to extend the participant pool, with initial participants referring additional professionals from their networks. A total of 44 participants completed the survey, representing a diverse range of African countries, professional backgrounds, and lengths of stay in Australia. This sample size was considered sufficient for achieving data saturation (Guest et al., 2006) for qualitative studies to ensure comprehensive coverage of the phenomena under investigation.

Data Collection

Data were collected through a semi-structured online survey featuring open-ended questions. The survey was developed based on themes identified in the literature while allowing flexibility for additional insights to emerge from participants responses. To refine the questions, it was piloted with a small group of five African professionals who were not included in the final sample. The survey was then distributed through professional networks and social media platforms catering to African migrants in Australia, ensuring broad reach and accessibility across states and territories. Key areas explored included length of stay in Australia, professional background, migration journey, workplace inclusion, challenges in professional integration and career progression, and strategies for navigating workplace cultures.

Data Analysis

Ethics approval was granted by Charles Darwin University (CDU) (Approval No. H20001). Ethics approval from CDU complies with the *Ethical Conduct in Human Research* guidelines, 2007. The data collected were analyzed using the thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) The process of analysis began with familiarization with the data, involving reading and re-reading the survey responses. Initial coding was performed using NVivo 12 software, and codes were subsequently collated into potential themes. These themes were reviewed in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set to ensure coherence. Clear

definitions and names for each theme were then generated. The final report included vivid examples from the data, linking the analysis back to the research questions and existing literature. To enhance the rigor of the analysis, investigator triangulation was employed, with two researchers independently coding a subset of the data and comparing their findings to ensure consistency and reliability (Patton et al., 1999; Patton, 1999).

Analyzed Data

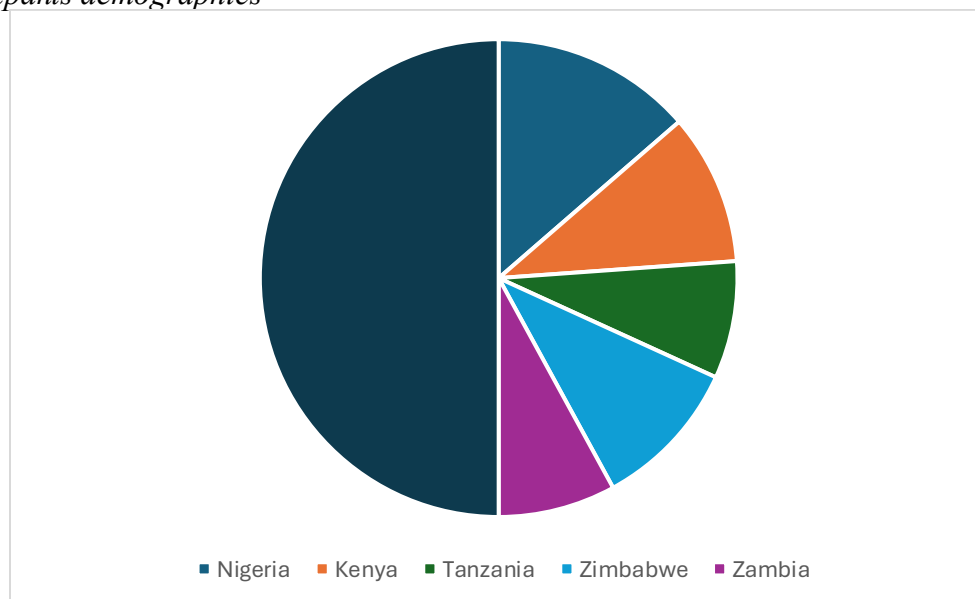
This section presents the narrative portraits of African migrant professionals in Australia, exploring their backgrounds, working contexts, and the key themes emerging from the analyzed data. It examines how these professionals navigate a complex and often challenging professional landscape. The participants represent a diverse cross-section of African migrants from various countries and professional backgrounds, each with a unique journey of integration into the Australian workplace.

The study includes participants from a broad range of African countries, with notable representation from West Africa (particularly Nigeria), East Africa (Kenya and Tanzania), and Southern Africa (Zimbabwe and Zambia). This geographic diversity contributes to a rich tapestry of cultural backgrounds and professional experiences in the Australian workforce. The decision to include participants from multiple African nations, rather than focusing on a single country, was intentional and driven by both methodological and practical considerations. Understanding how individuals from different African regions navigate similar or distinct challenges enhances insights into workplace diversity and professional integration.

Moreover, participants were asked about their length of stay in Australia, acknowledging that residency duration influences workplace experiences. This approach allows for an analysis of whether recent arrivals experience workplace integration differently from long-term migrants. By incorporating participants from multiple African nations and considering length of stay, this study provides a broader perspective on workplace diversity while ensuring a robust sample size, ultimately enriching the findings. For the purpose of this discussion, participants have been de-identified using their state of residence in Australia.

Figure 1

Participants demographics



Note: A graphical representation of the demographics of the participants in the study

Professional Context

The participants were spread across a wide array of sectors, reflecting the extensive contributions of African migrants to the Australian economy. The healthcare sector was significantly represented, with many participants working as nurses, doctors, and other health professionals. One participant remarked, “I am a registered nurse. Being a nurse in Australia of African descent has been interesting as nurses are always being sought after” (WA, Participant). This statement highlights both the high demand for healthcare professionals in Australia and the unique position of African migrants within this sector.

The study also included professionals from several other fields. In engineering and technical domains, participants worked in areas such as mining, hydrogeology, and information technology. The business and finance sector were represented by accountants, entrepreneurs, and business consultants, showcasing the diverse business expertise of African migrants. Also a few participants were identified as operating in the field of education and social services, including, academia, teachers, social workers, and community service professionals. This professional diversity offers a comprehensive view of the African migrant experience across various sectors of the Australian workforce. It highlights the significant roles African professionals play and underscores the complexities of their integration and impact within different professional domains. The discussion of the findings is pitched around three key themes with subsets themes based on the analyzed data namely: challenges, integration and coping strategies explored in navigating the workplace landscape.

The Challenges

Microaggressions and Subtle Biases

The shared experience among the participants was termed microaggressions and subtle biases in the workplace. About 56% of participants had these experiences, occasionally, with additional participants reporting more frequent occurrences (WA, NT, SA, VIC, Participants). These experiences ranged from subtle exclusion from informal networks to more overt instances of stereotyping or questioning of competence. One medical professional participant captured this succinctly:

“It has been difficult at times to work within a profession that has a small number of Africans. Subtle racism is questionable but can be difficult to label. Many at times patients assume you a nurse, cleaner or carer and you can occasionally see the surprise in their non-verbal responses” (Participant, WA).

Another participant shared a similar experience:

“I guess the expectation of our capabilities is quite low that we see the shock in their eyes that we have capacity to do our jobs effectively. It first comes with micromanagement, vetting every work we do including emails sent. it’s a not a good space to be in.” (Participant, NT)

“You can feel the bias from patients and their families. I’ll explain a medication and face multiple questions, but when another nurse usually non-African comes with the same explanation, they accept it without hesitation. They trust them completely. It shows how deep these biases run” (Participant, VIC)

These narratives encapsulate the nuanced nature of these challenges, illustrating how stereotypes and preconceptions impact professional interactions and perceptions. This misidentification not only undermines their professional status but also affects the quality of interactions, reinforcing harmful stereotypes about African migrants in the workplace. Such experiences can foster a hostile work environment, undermining the confidence and performance of these professionals. Participants shared experiences of being mistaken for lower-ranking positions despite possessing high qualifications, echoing findings from previous studies on the undervaluation of migrant professionals' skills (Rajendran et al., 2017; Tan & Cebulla 2023). This misidentification not only undermines individual professional status but also reinforces harmful stereotypes, contributing to the “boundaries of belonging” experienced by African migrants in Australia. (Gatwiri & Anderson, 2021).

Cultural Dynamics and Miscommunication

Another shared understanding among the participants, was how cultural dynamics and miscommunication play a significant role in shaping workplace experiences. While diversity is often celebrated, some participants have observed concerning side effects of exclusion and barriers to full participation in workplace activities and social interactions. According to these participants, this dynamic has sometimes led to reduced engagement, self-censorship, and missed opportunities for career advancement. Furthermore, when individuals attempt to address these issues, they often face additional challenges, such as being perceived as oversensitive. Several participants across various states reported experiences that highlight these issues. One participant shared:

“There was an instance where I felt excluded during a team meeting when cultural references were made that I couldn't relate to. Despite being an active contributor to the discussion, I felt somewhat sidelined as the conversation veered towards topics that didn't align with my cultural background. This experience highlighted the importance of fostering an inclusive environment where all team members feel valued and understood, regardless of their cultural background.” (NSW)

Another participant noted: “Communication. I am sometimes intimidated due to my accent and less likely to speak up when it matters. This has impacted my confidence in workplace discussions and potentially limited my contributions and visibility within the team.” (WA). These experiences underscore the need for more comprehensive cultural awareness training and the importance of creating truly inclusive workplace environments that value and leverage diverse perspectives and communication styles. They also highlight the ongoing challenges faced in navigating cultural nuances, and the potential for miscommunication to impact professional growth and sense of belonging.

Unspoken Challenges

A significant narrative that emerged from the study was the complex interplay of emotional labor and lack of representation that African migrant professionals face in Australian workplaces. The constant need to adapt, manage reactions to microaggressions, and maintain a positive demeanour in the face of subtle biases places an unacknowledged burden on these professionals. Simultaneously, the scarcity of African representation in leadership positions creates a challenging environment for career progression. Many struggle to reconcile their cultural identities with workplace expectations while also lacking visible role models who understand their unique challenges. When African professionals are perceived as different or

not fully aligning with workplace norms, they often face marginalization or stagnation in their careers. The absence of Africans in senior positions further compounds these issues, creating unseen barriers in promotion processes. This lack of representation not only affects individual career trajectories but also perpetuates a cycle of underrepresentation, and younger African professionals have fewer examples of success to aspire to.

This story raises concern regarding the complex intersection of cultural adaptation, professional identity, workplace dynamics, and systemic biases, shedding light on the often invisible hurdles African professionals must overcome in navigating their identities and careers in an Australian context. Participants across different states (Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia, and Queensland) described experiences of heightened scrutiny in their workplaces. As one participant expressed: “It first comes with micromanagement, vetting every work we do including emails sent.... it’s not a good space to be in” (VIC Participant). Participants from the Northern Territory, South Australia, and Western Australia shared similar experiences of developing resilience mechanisms. This was captured by one participant who noted: “Over the time we have developed a thick skin and tend to ignore some of these things... our level of resilience increased”. (NT Participant); “Lack of African representation in my current place of work (out of 3000 staff members I have only met 10 Africans” (WA, Participant); “For us to be fully accepted into leadership role without having to prove 10 times we are capable compared to others. Even when our resume says we can, we are viewed with a second look.” (SA Participant).

The analyzed data also revealed complex challenges around cultural and religious identity navigation in secular workplace settings. Participants described experiences of tension when their cultural or religious values differed from prevailing workplace norms, sometimes leading to perceived career barriers. This finding highlights the intricate interplay between maintaining cultural authenticity and adapting to Western workplace cultures. Some participants reported experiencing career stagnation when their cultural values differed from prevailing workplace norms. As one participant reflected on career progression challenges: “The difficulty of navigating different value systems has impacted our professional growth... remaining true to our cultural beliefs has sometimes meant staying in the same position for several years” (Participant, NT). These experiences underscore the need for more nuanced diversity and inclusion initiatives in Australian workplaces, ones that recognise and address the unique challenges faced by African migrant professionals, thereby providing much-needed representation and mentorship for the next generation in Australia.

Not About Whiteness (Inter-Migrant Discrimination)

The data revealed another dimension of an unexpected pattern of discrimination not primarily from the white majority, but from other migrant groups. These groups, often comprising individuals whose parents moved to Australia when they were young or who were born in Australia themselves, seem to wield their authority in ways that marginalise newer African migrants. This position informed the general understanding of the majority of the participants across the states and regions. In fact, the voice of one of the participants from WA, was quite deepening in buttressing this issue:

“I am in knowledge-based economy profession with rich understanding of workplace diversity having spent over two decades working across three continents, I know that inter-migrant discrimination exists, but the one I am experiencing in Australia is deafening... not only showing it to my face but casting aspersion on my person even before colleagues and students.” (WA, Participant).

This narrative explores the complex dynamics of inter-migrant discrimination, highlighting how these subtle power plays create additional barriers for African professionals striving to succeed in the Australian workforce. This highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of workplace discrimination that goes beyond simple majority-minority dynamics and considers the complex interplay of different migrant groups within the Australian professional landscape.

Coping Mechanism and Resilience

The interpretation of coping mechanisms among the participants in this study centred on focusing on job performance, self-affirmation, and building a positive mindset. These key sub-themes are discussed further below:

Focusing on Job Performance

The shared understanding among the participants on this issue is that their job performance should speak for them. According to the participants, overcoming adversity in the workplace allows individuals to derive a sense of worth from their professional accomplishments. This approach aligns with the concept of performance-based self-esteem (Hallsten et al., 2005). The perspective of a participant in VIC captured this position clearly when he said:

“When I discovered the intrigues among my workmates designed to perpetually undermine my contribution to the work setting, what I did was to spend sometime to understand my role more and what is expected of me at the workplace...so I developed a metrics to provide evidence of my performance anytime I am call upon to do. So, I don’t get caught unaware of their political intrigues against me” (VIC, Participant).

This strategy of focusing on measurable performance metrics serves multiple purposes. It provides tangible evidence of competence, potentially countering stereotypes or biases. Additionally, it offers a sense of control and agency in a work environment where other factors may seem beyond one's influence. Other participants from VIC, SA also echoed these sentiments: “I just do my job to the best of my ability and let it speak for me” (WA Participant); “To do your best and show that you are overqualified for your roles” (NT Participant).

While the above shared understanding captured the majority of the participants voices, it is also imperative to report that a few other participants made positive and encouraging comments on this issue as well. For instance, participants from WA and NT revealed that, the journey to professional recognition in Australia has been interesting and encouraging. In her words: “It has been an interesting, fantastic and enjoyable journey so far as my expertise Is utilised in my current job and being able to settle in smoothly” (WA, Participant) “As an academic, it has been challenging but my expertise is highly desirable” (NT, Participant).

The findings on this sub-theme presented a mixed picture. While some participants reported feeling valued and acknowledged, others described a sense of underappreciation or missed opportunities. However, one key finding for the researchers was the coping mechanisms encompassing hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism, which can be described as the concept of psychological capital (Luthans et al., 2007). The development of these psychological resources suggests a process of adaptation and growth in response to workplace challenges.

Self-Affirmation

By self-affirmation in the study participants mean that during challenging workplace dynamics, when their abilities and competencies are questioned, they cope well by leveraging their inner strengths and believing in themselves. The interpretation of self-affirmation from the analyzed data referred to the psychological process by which individuals maintain their self-integrity by affirming core personal values, particularly when faced with information or experiences that threaten their self-concept (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Sherman et al., 2020). According to self-affirmation theory, when individuals reflect on values that are personally significant, they are less likely to experience distress and react defensively when confronted with information that contradicts or threatens their sense of self (Sherman & Cohen, 2006).

Self-affirmation serves as a psychological buffer against identity threats by reinforcing an individual's core values and sense of self-worth (Cohen & Sherman, 2014). Research suggests that affirming one's potential fosters resilience, enabling individuals to navigate workplace challenges by cultivating a growth mindset and leveraging personal strengths (Roberts & Mayo, 2019). For African migrant professionals, self-affirmation helps mitigate the negative effects of bias and discrimination, allowing them to persist in their careers and explore alternative pathways to success.

This appears to be a recurring theme among participants across states and territories. Majority of the participants (30), from WA, NT and SA used a terminology known as “glass ceiling” to share their experiences of how they have been able to navigate workplace dynamics, including lack of inclusion. The thoughts of the participants are well captured below:

“Often...you get a job that perfectly match your experience and qualifications..... you will find someone in a certain position going on holidays or on annual leave and they would beacon on you to fill that position for a moment.... most times those people don't come back to the role...and instead of them to give the role to you...they give it to someone who's less qualified or your junior. ...those opportunities are not very easily given to people of colour unfortunately...then you start questioning your ability” (Participants, WA, NT and SA).

In response to such challenges, participants employed various self-affirmation strategies: “I dwell on what's essential - I focus on my work, and I do it very well. I have a strong work ethic. I know my boundaries.” (VIC, Participant) “I decide to encourage myself by telling myself that there are so many routes we can take to reach our destination in life.” (WA Participant). These findings underscore the critical role of self-affirmation in navigating workplace challenges for migrant professionals. While organizational barriers persist, the resilience demonstrated through these self-affirmation strategies reveals a strong sense of personal agency and determination. However, this reliance on individual coping mechanisms should not overshadow the pressing need for systemic change. Organisations have a responsibility to foster truly inclusive environments that value diverse talents and experiences through formal mentoring programs, creating informal networking opportunities, and actively working to dismantle the “glass ceiling” that many participants have encountered. By doing so, workplaces can harness the full potential of their diverse workforce, leading to more dynamic, innovative, and equitable professional environments that benefit both individuals and organizations alike.

Building Positive Mindset

Across the professional spectrum of the participants and data analysis, the shared commonality is the power of a positive mindset. What participants convey to the researchers by positive mindset is the resilience mechanisms they employ to navigate challenging situations without experiencing mental or nervous breakdowns. According to some participants from NT and WA: “Self-love. Reinforcing in my mind that there is nothing wrong with me.” (Participant, NT)

“I am very comfortable with my heritage and background.... whenever we feel challenged in our workplace, we see it as ignorance of the other party and focus on what we know and am proud of our abilities because our backgrounds had taught us to look at challenges as nothing” (Participant, WA).

It is quite deepening to gain that sense of understanding of interpretation of positive mindset outside the context of resilience. More importantly, is the fact that the challenges at workplace settings are conceived as non-issue as the participants viewed their background and cultural identity as a source of strength and unique perspective. This approach illustrates how African migrant professionals reframe potential sources of discrimination into strengths and unique attributes (Bolaji et al., 2022; Mwanri et al., 2021). By maintaining a strong sense of cultural identity and pride, they create a psychological buffer against the negative impacts of stereotypes and biases. This highlights the importance of a positive self-image in overcoming workplace challenges, showcasing the role of personality and mental attitude in preserving mental wellbeing and professional confidence. By reframing challenges as opportunities for growth and viewing biases as reflections of others' limitations rather than personal shortcomings, these professionals sustain a positive outlook that bolsters their resilience. The analysis of these themes offers profound insights into the complex experiences of African migrant professionals in Australian workplaces. Their challenges are multifaceted, encompassing overt discrimination, subtle microaggressions, and unspoken pressures. Yet, the data reveals a compelling narrative of resilience, adaptability, and determination among these professionals.

Discussion of Findings

The analyzed data highlights how cultural misunderstandings and stereotypes significantly influence their experiences, often resulting in exclusion from workplace activities and social interactions (Berry & Bell, 2012). This finding aligns with the study by Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2007), which identified similar challenges in the integration of visibly different migrant groups into the Australian labor market. The exclusion faced during team meetings, often due to unfamiliar cultural references, underscores the subtle ways in which workplace cultures can inadvertently marginalize migrant professionals.

These experiences highlight the critical role of cultural intelligence in diverse workplaces, as emphasized by Davis et al., (2016), who underscore the need for comprehensive strategies to foster truly inclusive workplace cultures beyond superficial diversity initiatives. The data revealed unspoken challenges that align with the concept of “everyday racism” explored by Skadegård & Horst, (2021 and Fozdar (2023). The pressure to assimilate reflects the ongoing tension between integration and cultural preservation experienced by many migrant professionals (Molla, 2021). Emotional labor, including managing microaggressions and adapting communication styles, contributes to the “psychological tax” described by Delgado and Stefancic (2023). Furthermore, discrimination from other migrant groups

complicates workplace dynamics, underscoring the need to move beyond majority-minority frameworks. This finding aligns with Gatwiri et al., (2023), who examine the multifaceted nature of belonging within African diasporic experiences.

Despite these challenges, the data reveals resilience and adaptability among African migrant professionals. Coping mechanisms, such as performance excellence, self-affirmation, and building positive mindsets, align with psychological capital and resilience research Luthans et al., (2007). The emphasis on “proving oneself,” identified by Rajendran et al., (2017), reflects both an effective strategy to counter stereotypes and the additional pressures faced by migrant professionals to continuously demonstrate their competence.

The study revealed several issues that need to be addressed if Australia is to fully achieve the philosophy of multiculturalism for which it is known. The thematic analysis of the challenges has deepened the understanding of issues prevalent in workplaces across states and territories in Australia (Hine et al., 2022). While the challenges are not surprising, the coping mechanisms reported by the participants offer a deeper understanding of the struggles and resilience of African migrants as they navigate the chaotic situations in the workplaces, they find themselves in (Bolaji et al., 2022; Fergusson et al., 2018).

It is well recognized that every organisation or workplace has its own culture and set of values, often centered around effective communication, creativity, innovation, and fostering a diverse environment that guides teamwork and workplace behavior (Davis et al., 2016; Seuffert, 2020). While these values are deeply embedded in organizational frameworks, the findings of this study suggest that in practice, they often remain rhetorical rather than serving as genuine drivers of diversity and cultural sensitivity within Australian workplaces.

In Australia, organizational discourse, diversity and inclusion take centre stage (Kirton & Greene, 2021). As a result, no workplace in Australia is without a documented blueprint outlining the organization’s commitment to promoting diversity, equity in job opportunities, and inclusive practices. However, the challenge lies in whether these organizations actually follow or implement these policies. The study findings suggest that diversity and inclusion are yet to become standard practice in Australian workplaces. Therefore, a paradigm shift is needed for workplaces to take deliberate actions toward creating an environment where all employees, regardless of background or socio-cultural orientation, feel valued and experience being valued. The findings related to discrimination, bullying, harassment, and racial profiling at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) are particularly instructive, highlighting that these unethical practices do occur in the workplace. Anderson’s (2024) apology on the matter further emphasizes the seriousness of these issues: “On behalf of everyone at the ABC, I am sorry for any and all racist behaviour and past harms experienced by our Indigenous and CALD [Culturally and Linguistically Diverse] employees, either currently or formerly employed,” (Anderson, October 2024).

Achieving equitable practices and embracing the ideals of diversity and inclusion in Australian workplaces is possible. By giving adequate recognition to the inherent potential that Australia offers to everyone, coupled with courage and boundless opportunities, the researchers believe that any organization with this mindset can thrive in an inclusive and diverse environment, where employees are happy and willing to contribute to the growth and development of the organization.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study has highlighted the complexities within Australian workplaces, particularly the unethical practices that hinder diversity and inclusion for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) minority groups, especially African migrants. Despite these challenges,

participants demonstrated a strong sense of resilience, which helped them persevere in such chaotic organizational settings. The findings are further supported by the apology issued to CALD employees at an Australian government organisation (ABC), acknowledging the unprofessional conduct and treatment of staff from diverse cultural backgrounds. This paper acknowledges that achieving equitable and inclusive practices in Australian workplaces is attainable, provided organizations make a deliberate effort to implement the diversity and inclusion policies outlined in their workplace blueprints.

To achieve diversity and inclusion in Australian workplaces, the following recommendations could guide the implementation of organizational blueprints:

- Cultural Intelligence Programs: Implement initiatives that equip both leaders and employees with the skills to navigate cultural differences, address unconscious biases, and foster inclusive workplaces.
- Reverse Mentorship and Leadership Development: Establish mentorship programs that pair senior leaders with migrant professionals to facilitate knowledge exchange, break hierarchical barriers, and promote inclusive career progression.
- Employee-Generated Cultural Narratives: Provide platforms such as blogs and podcasts for employees to share cultural experiences, celebrate authenticity, and enhance understanding and engagement in the workplace.
- Psychological Training and Workshops: Offer training programs that build confidence, enhance cross-cultural interactions, improve team dynamics, and reduce workplace exclusion, particularly for leaders and employees with limited intercultural experience.
- International Exposure and Exchange: Promote overseas exchange programs to provide global perspectives and mitigate Australia's geographical isolation where relevant.
- Inclusive Leadership and Allyship: Develop structured allyship initiatives and inclusive leadership programs with tools and accountability frameworks to ensure meaningful workplace diversity beyond recruitment.
- Professional Coaching: Provide cross-cultural coaching through external expertise and internal advocacy to empower migrant professionals in navigating workplace structures while preserving cultural authenticity.

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